THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. IV. May 20 Iyar 19, 5698 No. 7

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by MORTIMER J. COHEN

Published by

THE SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM

15 West 86th Street, New York, N. Y.

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The RECONSTRUCTIONIST is published bi-weekly for twenty consecutive issues starting in October, by The Society for the Advancement of Judaism, 15 West 86th St., New York, N. Y. Subscription $1.00 a year; foreign $1.25; individual copy 10 cents. Entered as second class matter January 9, 1935, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.
The editorials represent the opinions of the editors only.
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EDITORIALS

The American Jewish Congress Election and Plebiscite

THE American-Jewish Congress has issued a call for a "democratic national election" to be held on June 25, 26, and 27. The specific purpose of the election will be to choose 400 delegates to the forthcoming "Extraordinary Session" of the Congress and to secure a mandate from the masses of American Jewry with regard to "the fundamental questions of Jewish policy relating to the work of defending the Jewish status."

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST has often expressed the hope that the American-Jewish Congress might help bring order out of the chaos in our Jewish communal life in this country. But as we study the details in the plan for this announced "democratic election" we begin to have our doubts.

A principal feature in the election will be a plebiscite which will present to the voters the following questions:

1. Shall the American-Jewish Congress . . . be the representative agency of the Jews in America in the defense of the equal rights of Jews?
2. Do you favor the reorganization of American-Jewish communities on a democratic, representative basis . . .?
3. Do you favor a free Jewish state in Palestine?
4. Do you favor the continuance of the boycott against Nazi Germany . . . ?

Could anyone suggest a vaguer and more general list of questions? As we read them, these questions have very little relevance to the fundamental issues of Jewish policy today. The democratic process becomes significant only when it makes for discussion and analysis of specific and concrete measures. What, for example, is the significance of registering one's wish for a free Jewish state in Palestine? There might have been some sense in polling Jewish opinion on the question of partition, but was this too concrete and controversial for the Congress to investigate?

As the questions are put, there is little doubt that the overwhelming numbers of those voting will answer affirmatively. Will the Congress regard that as a mandate to speak for American Jewry? Will the Congress regard itself as the authorized spokesman for American Jewry even if only a minority of the eligible Jewish voters participate in the elections?

If this procedure is legitimate then any other Jewish organization can hold similarly "democratic national elections" and proclaim itself the authoritative spokesman for the Jewish community. The opposition will in the nature of things, ignore the poll, but the vote of that organization's limited adherents will be enough to vest it with authority. Indeed the "Jewish Peo-

ple's Committee for United Action against Anti-Semitism and Fascism," a united front group organized by the Jewish Bureau of the Communist Party has actually launched a similar campaign to gather votes by which it hopes to secure recognition as official Jewish spokesman, It is obvious that such procedure can only add to the chaos and disorganization in American Jewry.

We are similarly concerned over the Congress's indiscriminate award of the Jewish franchise. A community that enjoys political sovereignty, if it is a democracy, ought to award the franchise to all mature men and women since all will have to live under the laws which its representative legislative agencies enact. A community, however, that carries on its group life on a voluntary basis ought to allow the franchise only to such people as have indicated their willingness to share in that group's life. Jewish group life is obviously a voluntary phenomenon. The Jewish franchise therefore ought to be given only to such Jews who are now participating in Jewish life, in one form or another. A prerequisite ought to be membership in a synagogue, in the Zionist organization, a contribution to the UPA or JDC, affiliation with at least some Jewish group that carries on a recognized program of affirmative Jewish living. But all one has to do to vote in the Congress election is to pay 10¢! What is the degree of responsibility which such an electorate assumes?

The road to Jewish unity, we repeat, can lie only in a formula for cooperation among the representatives of all leading national Jewish organizations. The American-Jewish Congress, the American-Jewish Committee and the B'nai B'rith must take the initiative in calling a national conference of representatives of all such organizations. Such representatives acting in concert can alone set up the kind of representative machinery which will legitimately speak for American Jewry.

Petty partisanship as well as a certain measure of genuine ideological differences in the approach to Jewish problems today separate these groups and make the step we urge difficult, but it is the only road to unity, and they who want to achieve it must work diligently and tactfully to bring it about. The kind of antics in which the American-Jewish Congress is indulging through this "democratic election" and "plebiscite" will only widen the gulf that separates the organized groups of American Jewry, and will tend to further the chaos from which American Jewry is struggling desperately to emerge.

Act Now To Preserve Democracy!

THE essential difference between a democratic and an authoritarian form of government is to be found in the civil liberties which the people enjoy under the one and are denied under the other. In fact, the extent to which a people enjoy the rights of free speech, press and assembly is the barometer of the state of health of a democracy at any given time. At present, for instance, Jersey City, N. J., has an authoritarian form of government under the dictatorship of Mayor (I-Am-the-Law) Hague. It is not a totalitarian city as yet, insofar as the total life of the people therein is not completely regimented. But Jersey City has an authoritarian or quasi-fascist form of government, for civil liberties have ceased to exist therein. The recently publicized shocking events bear testimony to that alarming fact.

The first step in combatting usurpers of political or economic power is to expose them and their machinations. If the people want to have a democracy and be the ultimate arbiters of their own destiny, they must know the facts of their existence in order to act intelligently. A functioning democracy, therefore, guards jealously the right of the people to free speech, press and assembly. From this point of view there has been no more important service done in our country for the preservation of democracy in

these troublous times than that accomplished by the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee of the Senate.

In two years, on ninety thousand dollars, the LaFollette Committee has made itself our foremost agency for the defense of civil liberties. Among other things, it made public the true story of the Chicago Memorial Day "riot." It exposed Johnstown, Pa.'s fascistic "Citizen's Committee." It made public the names of twenty-five hundred business concerns that had spent nine million dollars on labor spies. It helped clean up "Bloody Harlan." In general, it has exposed the most flagrant violations of civil rights in this country and has focused the spotlight on the violators.

Because it represents the very heart of our democracy, the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee ought to be made a permanent institution. Right now one of its major tasks should be to fumigate Jersey City. But—it has no more funds. It needs $60,000 to continue its activities, or else its work will come to a standstill. Reactionaries are quite naturally striving to kill this Committee, and lovers of democracy must therefore hasten to act now to urge the continuance of the work of this most invaluable Committee. We urge our readers and their organizations to write to their Senators and Congressmen demanding that the necessary appropriation be voted for the LaFollette Civil Liberties Committee. Special communications should also be sent immediately to Senator James F. Byrnes, chairman of the Senate Committee of Audit and Control of Contingent Expenses. It has well been said that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." If our democracy is to be preserved, we must act now before it is too late.

What Is A Jewish Book?

JEWISH Book Week is a wholesome stimulus. Its observance should certainly bring to the consciousness of American Jews the necessity, in times like these, for self knowledge. If Jewish Book Week succeeds in making Jews realize that without a thorough understanding of themselves they are not fortified to resist attack, it will be making a distinct contribution to American Jewish life, comparable to many a minor festival. It will earn its place on the calendar.

We should not, however, merely take the average bookseller's attitude toward the Week, and urge that Jews buy more books. We are not interested, and should not be interested, merely in the number of books sold. We should be concerned with the type of books bought and read. A novel whose main character is a Jew is not necessarily a *Jewish* book. And a book which, no matter how artistically, reproduces the amusing dialect of an un-Aryanized family, is not necessarily a Jewish book. Nor does a book become a Jewish book by virtue of the Jewishness of the author's parents.

What is a Jewish book? The question has been asked many times in similar forms: what is Jewish art? Jewish music? Perhaps the answer can best be given by stating that a book, a work of art, or a composition may justifiably be labeled "Jewish" if it fulfills the conditions required to qualify a person as an active Jew. A person who saturates his mind and soul with a knowledge of and love for the Jewish past, who is aware of the realities of the Jewish present and assumes responsibility for the advancement of Jewish life in the future, is a Jew in the best sense of the word.

A book is Jewish by the same criteria. This refers, of course, only to books written in languages other than Hebrew. Books published in Hebrew, whether they be Bibles, or Hebrew translations of Hamlet, are, by any reasonable definition, Jewish books. The assumption is that Jewish Book Week deals only with books written in English for English reading Jews. Now, a book is Jewish if it concerns itself with any aspect of Jewish life. If it is historical fiction, its characters must be identified as Jews by reason of their social, cultural, or religious distinctiveness. Its settings must be those

places and periods of time which reflect Jewish civilization in action. History, essays, poetry, philosophy, sociology—all these forms of literary expression assume the aspect of Jewishness when they are concerned with the physical and spiritual life of the Jewish people, when they reflect the hopes, the experiences, the ideals, the psychology, the vicissitudes of Jews. Books that analyze and clarify the position of the Jews in the world today, that help the Jews to understand their status and to orient themselves properly to the rest of the world, are Jewish books.

We may very well discover, when we set out to acquire books like these, that, despite our reputation of being the People of the Book, we suffer a poverty of books. There are still many books that remain to be written. We have as yet no book that could be placed in the hands of the average layman which could introduce him to an intelligent understanding of the Bible. There is no good book on religion for young people. The great American-Jewish novel has still to be created. There is a sad paucity of fine poetry in English. There is hardly any organized material on the realities of the American Jewish community: perhaps someone will some day write a Jewish "Middletown."

Let us then think of Jewish Book Week this year both as an occasion for refining our standards, and for accepting an earnest challenge to our creativity.

The German Jews Look at the Past

By Dora Edinger*

"If Emancipation is to be had only on condition that we depart from the law we consider obligatory, then, to our deep sorrow, we must say that we would rather renounce emancipation." (Moses Mendelsohn's "Jerusalem," 1783.)

In contrast to the attitude of Mendelsohn expressed in the above quotation, David Friedlander, in an open letter to Toller, the leading Protestant minister of Berlin in 1799, took as his text the following quotation from the New Testament:

"But when that which is perfect is come, that which is part shall be done away. When I was a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I have become a man, I have put away childish things." (I Corinthians 13:10-11.)

Friedlander was one of the leaders of the movement of Jewish Emancipation and offered to embrace Christianity and bring other Jewish families into the Christian fold, if they could be accepted with certain reservations on points of doctrine that were unacceptable even to liberal Jews of his kind. (See Gordis' "Jesus and his Jewish Kinsman" in The Reconstructionist, February 25, 1938). How does the German Jew of today look upon this period of the Emancipation and the rapprochement to German Christendom made by men like Friedlander?

Mr. Pinson, in his excellent article on the Jewish Spirit in Nazi Germany (Menorah Journal, Autumn 1936) shows that there is a strong religious revival among the Jews in Germany. But, as he rightly points out, the crowded synagogues do not mean that Jews necessarily come there for worship. They also gather there because, in many communities, the synagogue is the only place where they can meet. For undoubtedly there are many whose training makes it utterly impossible for them to adopt the traditional religious services as a spiritual help in their present situation. The idea of a significance in history affords them that religious help without which they could not go on living. The typical German

*One time editor of the *Zeitschrift des Schwestern Verblandes,* B'nai B'rith, now engaged in social work in the Henry Street Settlement, New York, N. Y., and in research work for the National Council of Jewish Women.

training they received directs them in this way. For even in those schools where the former humanistic ideal of standard education has been weakened by the recent trend of German development, history rather than science is offered instead. If, therefore, one peruses the editorials of the German-Jewish press or if one looks at the programs of the *Kulturbund* and the Courses for Adult Education, one finds as much instruction in history as in religion.

If a slight difference is to be noticed between the younger groups and those of middle age, it is that the youth show greater interest in ancient Jewish history while the older group prefer to study Jewish history of the last few centuries. This group want to know about Heine and Boerne, about the experiment of the *Verein fur Kultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* started in 1819 by Gans and Moser and by the only one who remained faithful to it, Zunz, the founder of the Science of Judaism, about Lassalle and Moses Hess, about Geiger and Riesser, about the prominent personalities involved in the process of assimilation. They do not know about the much slower assimilation that went on less obviously in small communities, in the private life of the German-Jewish family. It is not pure knowledge that they are looking for. More or less unconsciously, they are seeking proofs of their historical and cultural right to their native land.

Not only since 1933 have this group of German Jews felt that their right was not as unquestionable as they had considered it to be. Jewish publications immediately after the World War show the consciousness of these doubts and try to banish them by stressing the *historic* connection with the German soil. To this category belong Jakob Wassermann's tragic confession, "My Life as a German and as a Jew," Herman Sinsheimer's less gloomy autobiography, "By the Waters of Babylon" and the novel of Arnold Zweig, "The Flight of von Spandow." In this novel, he draws a picture of Jewish family life in a small community near Berlin at the time of the Napoleonic Wars. His Jews behave as well-bred young people in Berlin would have behaved a hundred years later, while wearing, with much charm, the costumes of their ancestors.

What a few sensitive artists as far back as 1920 felt to be needed and what readers then were not disposed to appreciate has since become a literary fashion. I refer to the historical fiction of which so much has lately been published for the Jewish public that has to spend a great part of its time at home and is therefore eager to read. Many novels have made their appearance that are not worth much but that offer all that their readers are looking for, novels as untrue, to life as the mediaeval romances that the bourgeoisie read around 1870, and as interesting to analyze. Here lovely girls and wise old men pose before the scenery of German landscape affording a romantic escape into dreamland out of the tragic problems of the present day. Even well-known Jewish critics, who were once most hard to please, seem to take no note either of the poor style or of the obvious tendency of these books.

When so many German-Jewish families in 1933, for the first time in generations, left their homes in the smaller towns either to move to larger communities or to emigrate, many documents of the past were in danger of being destroyed or lost. As editor of a Jewish periodical, I urged readers to send in for examination and possible publication whatever they might discover of old letters, testaments and similar documents. I received many of these and, in addition, a number of unpublished memoirs written in the late decades of the nineteenth and in the early years of the twentieth century. For it was not then unusual for a man who had retired from business to spend the long hours of unwonted leisure in writing down the story of his life. In well-to-do families such memoirs have even been elaborately printed and bound, but they are seldom read. I printed some characteristic ex-

cerpts from these memoirs and the reaction of my readers to them proved very interesting. A few of my readers were touched and even stirred by the publication of the memoirs, but others protested violently. They did not like to hear of the "superstitions" and of the seemingly "uncultured" (i.e., non-German) homes of their ancestors.

The understanding readers all belonged to the younger generation, men and women influenced by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. The protests came from much older men, all of them non-Zionists. These men did not like to hear that, even as late as 1865, evil spirits were averted by magic from new-born baby girls; that, in the Napoleonic era, the Jews in a small town near Berlin, unlike those in Arnold Zweig's novel, spoke Yiddish and lived mentally in the Middle Ages; that, when a butterfly flew into a *schul,* the whole community discussed excitedly which rabbi's holy spirit had thus returned to his place of worship. This interesting reaction shows, as does the success of the above-mentioned sentimental novels and their lenient reception by the Jewish critics, that the older generation of German Jews have absolutely forgotten a past spent in Germany but *in a German ghetto.* The sons of the men who had written the memoirs thought it unwise and dangerous to call attention to the recency of assimilation. For assimilation to a German culture, which at that time was non-nationalistic and universal-minded, was the price that their fathers had been asked to pay and had paid for their emancipation. But a new and thoroughly changed Germany called for Germans, not for men who had become Germans and that not so very long ago.

It has often been noted in this country how "un-Jewish" that generation of German Jews seems to have been. But the fact is that they had no alternative. In the introduction to one of the many Jewish autobiographies published recently by the *Schockenbucherei,* the editor thus quotes the Jewish historian Bernard Wachstein: "The love of both (the old rabbinical writings and the new discoveries of secular science) hid the deep abyss between the two *Weltanschauungen* that were so utterly different, as the Orthodox believers in Galicia and Hungary felt with marvelous instinct" and therefore refused to assimilate.

Rahel in one of her letters compares her life to a tree that was torn out of the soil and then transplanted in reverse, the treetop in place of the roots and the roots in place of the branches. I believe that this is a fair symbol of the German Jews during the process of assimilation. It absorbed all their energies as long as it was going on. Theirs was the situation of men who forget, because they necessarily have to forget, the cultural chasm that they are trying to bridge. Some of the older generation truly believed that they had succeeded and were able to speak of their way out of the Medieval Ghetto into German humanitarianism. But their sons, who down somewheres in their subconsciousness felt that their parents had not succeeded and that the changing outer world was also aware of the fact, covered that period with amnesia, a well-known symptom of a state of mind that for some vital reason cannot bear to look back.

These German Jews could not afford to know that their grandfathers and, more especially, their grandmothers, had lived a Yiddish every day life, though living in Germany; that they had spoke in German only on state occasions; that not only had the letters of Moses Mendelsohn to his family been written in Yiddish, but Wilhelm von Humboldt had had to learn to write in Hebrew characters in order to correspond with his friend, Henrietta Herz (Grau, the head of the new governmental institute for Jewish history in Munich says of Humboldt that he was assimilated by the Jews); and that Berta Badt-Straus, the biographer of Rahel had found that her private papers were written in Hebrew letters so that the biographer's Gentile husband had to procure the aid of a rabbi in editing them. When such was the situation among the most advanced

Berlin Jews, it is to be assumed that in distant communities, the same state of affairs continued for generations thereafter.

At the end of the 18th century, under the influence of French Revolutionary ideas, a book appeared in Germany that became enormously popular and is still to be found in most German libraries both public and private. The author, Baron Knigge, was a declassed nobleman who, drawing on his manifold experience, wrote an amusing book on manners, *Ueber den Umgang mit Menschen.* It contains a chapter on Jews, which is retained in the later editions. The author first explains that there are Jews who are "human beings" and that the earlier chapters of the book apply to them as well as to Gentiles, but that there are also other Jews who must be dealt with in a special way. Now this writer is absolutely without prejudices, which makes his book most attractive. Some chapters, those, for example, "on swindlers" and "on mistresses" give amusing proof of this. "In America," he explains, "there are Jews who behave just like Gentiles and even intermarry. In Holland and in some German cities, especially in Berlin, a few Jewish families live exactly like other people. In these instances one of the reasons why the character of this people has so many unfavorable traits disappears. Now most Jews do not attain higher culture but drop the simplicity and austerity of their morals to adopt Christian vices and follies. A Jewish dandy, debauchee and freethinker, does not show off to advantage. It is well known that the unaccountable contempt which we show to Jews, the pressure under which they live in most countries and the mere impossibility of their making a living except by usury have debauched them and provoked meanness and deceit. Besides, there are well-meaning and generous men among them in spite of all these circumstances. But here we have to speak about Jews, not as they might be under different conditions, nor as some individuals among them are, but as their national character has to be dealt with in most of them.

"They are indefatigable where they can earn something and make possible the nearly impossible because they have connections in all countries and because they will not be discouraged by any harsh treatment or rebuff. They may therefore be used in the most delicate transactions if they are well paid. They are discreet, if it is in their interest to be so, are cautious and sometimes too timid. They are witty and have the most surprising ideas, and are extreme flatterers. Thus they acquire influence quite unnoticed in the homes of the great, and many can achieve for you what you could never achieve without them. They are distrustful, but once we have proved that we are conscientious and as good as our word, if they have had frequent business contact with us and know us not to be without means, they will help us where no Christian usurer will. But if you are a spendthrift, or if you are in doubtful pecuniary circumstances, no one will find it out as quickly as a Jew. Do not imagine that he will then lend you anything, and, if he should do so for speculation, know that he will demand such excessive interest that your situation will become much worse.

"Jews are very unwilling to part with their money. Therefore, if anybody whom they do not know intimately wants to borrow money, they ask him to come some other time and they find out, from tradesmen, neighbors, servants and the like, the most private affairs of their prospective debtor. If the latter returns at the appointed time, the Jew will not be in or will wait with advancing the money for hours, days and weeks. If you show the least embarrassment because of this situation or too much joy at the prospect of help, then the Jew will not part with his money, not even if he has already started to count it out. This is to be expected in such a situation. If you have business dealings with the rank and file Hebrew, you must keep either your eyes or your purse open.

"Quite naturally a Gentile cannot rely upon the conscientiousness or the protestations of Jews. They will give copper for gold, three yards instead of four, old goods instead of new, counterfeit money instead of good, if you know no better than to accept them. If you want to sell old clothes, come to terms with the first Jew who offers you a reasonable price. For if you will let him go away, the news that there is something to be bartered will spread and the word passed that Mendel's or Joseph's business is not to be spoiled. It will be announced in the synagogue. They faithfully stick together in such matters. Crowds of Jews will come to your house, but each one will offer you less until you call in the first one again, who will offer less than before, or until you are so sick of your goods that you give them away for half of what they are worth to some one who will faithfully hand them over to the first bidder.

"But this nation has its own characteristic ways in everything, I mean the rank and file not those who, perhaps not even to their own happiness, have adopted Gentile ways. Listen to their sacred music and the quite original way it is performed. Watch their dances. Look how even the richest old-fashioned Jews decorate their homes, where there is always some reminiscence of Solomon's temple, with its scarlet, rose-colored and finely twined silk."

This is a typical description of the non-assimilated Jew as we know him from accounts of Polish or Alsatian Ghetto life. Thus Heine speaks about the Jew "Lumpchen," Bettine Brentano about "Veilchen," Grimm about the "Preussche." As for Humboldt, like a true liberal, he demanded emancipation not for the sake of the Jews but out of respect for the "dignity of man," and assumed that the typical behavior of Jews was due to their treatment by the Prussian government. He says in his "Gutachten 1809": "It is irreconcilable with the simplest notions of the dignity of man for a whole nation that is merely unfortunate to be judged in this way because of a superficial difference, so that the testimony of a blameless Jew is not considered to be worth as much as that of any Gentile. But the answer will undoubtedly be that the difference is not one of culture, or even of manners but of that which makes man truly human. But if such unnatural conditions exist, they ought to be changed at once, because otherwise the despised man will remain despised whatever he may do. If any government approve these conditions by legislation, it would only cause the emigration of the better elements of the nation while the dregs remained. It is most dangerous for the morale of the [Prussian] nation to tolerate people who can be trusted so little that they cannot enjoy full civic rights even if their cultural standard is a high one." In his famous preface to Menasseh ben Israel's *Vindiciae Judaeorum,* Moses Mendelsohn had said: "You bind our hands and accuse us of not using them"; similarly, Humboldt concluded: "Only he whose once fettered hands have been freed can become that which all men are by nature."

These are the ideas of a truly liberal statesman, but it took time before they were carried out. The civil emancipation, belated by the wave of nationalism that followed the revolt against Napoleon's universal empire, did not appear until about 1848 when there was a resurgence of liberal ideas. In Oldenburg, a state in north west Germany where Jews were not given family names until 1852, a teacher could describe his school days there as late as the early fifties of the last century in these terms:

"There was still a real *heder* in my home town with all the deficiencies of that historic institution. We sat, between thirty and fifty boys, in one crowded room, which was sometimes used as a kitchen. The younger ones acted as servants to our teacher's wife. . . . I, for instance, had to peel potatoes. When I came early in the morning, I had to go

to the kitchen, where my portion, a pail of potatoes, was waiting for me. No one cared how long it took. I did not have to be through until eleven o'clock. A second boy had to shine the boots of the teacher's whole family. A third had to come half an hour before school began, because the baby had gotten so used to his voice that it would only keep quiet when he was singing. A fourth did not have to come until ten and he then had to go marketing. The other boys did nothing at all or played with buttons, perhaps to learn to count, though that was not taught in school. After three years, I was able to read the *shema,* but I did not learn the translation until I became a teacher myself. Our teacher, an old-fashioned *melammed,* was said to have been a good grammarian. He took charge of the highest grade only, teaching Bible, Mishnah and *dikduk. . . .*"

Shortly after the Emancipation, a simple and pious Jew wrote a sincere and touching autobiography. It shows the process by which the individual Jew became a German, following the suggestions of liberal statesmen. The author thought that his career from a humble childhood to what appeared to his imagination as the most splendid height attainable, the rank of an officer in the Prussian army, was a manifestation of the very will of God. Consequently, Prussian martial laws had to be respected as God's Torah and individual prayer had to replace Jewish community prayer.

Characters less naively religious found other ways to fight for the old innate prophetic ideals of right and justice. They found these expressed in the proclamations of the French Revolution as well as in a Germany which at that time was minded to be anti-imperialistic and universal in outlook. Schiller's writings which were enthusiastically quoted by Jews are typical expressions of this German non-nationalistic universalism. "The patriotic interest is only important to immature nations, for the youth of the world. To write for one nation only is a poor and paltry ideal. Such narrowness is unbearable to a philosophical mind."

The autobiographical writings of the first emancipated Berlin Jews show with what ease they left a past that could give no opportunity for individual self-fulfilment, especially for women, in order to embrace German culture which then gave such opportunities in abundance. These Jews not only never forgot their past but spoke of it with pride. They thought their progress from the darkness of the ghetto to enlightenment was well worth describing. They sincerely believed that they had helped make the world more fit to live in by their example in emerging from a national into a universal culture.

> "For then will I turn to the peoples
> A pure language,
> That they all may call upon the name of the Lord,
> To serve Him with one consent."
> (Sephania 3:9)

> "Moreover, concerning the stranger that is not of Thy people Israel, when he shall come out of a far country for Thy name's sake—for they shall hear Thy great name and of Thy mighty hand, and of thine outstretched arm—when he shall come and pray towards this house; hear Thou in heaven Thy holy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for; that all peoples of the earth may know Thy name, to fear Thee, as does Thy people Israel, and that they may know that Thy name is called upon this house which I have built." (I Kings 8:41-43).

These and similar verses were frequently quoted by the most radical advocates of universal humanitarianism such as David Friedlander and Israel Jacobson. If the next generation did not fully share their fathers' optimistic faith in the advancement of the human race from nationalism to universalism, they nevertheless did not openly repudiate it. They still clung to those ideas, though they knew that Germany itself was growing more and more nationalistic.

Until the *Schockenverlag,* after 1933, began publishing the autobiographies that offered documentary evidence to the effect that the period of emancipation had lasted no longer than a life-time, this entire literature was little known. The reasons afford an interesting explanation

of the present state of mind of many of the older Jews of pronouncedly German type.

The whole process of assimilation covered two-thirds of a century. It began in the community of Berlin and did not reach the smaller communities until half a century later when Germany no longer welcomed this assimilation because the nation itself had turned its back on its former ideals. The east of Germany was assimilated before the west and southwest as far as the small cities were concerned.

This was due in part to the fact that the Prussian government required an educational test before conferring naturalization on those Jews who had become Prussian subjects after 1812, when the Jews in the "old provinces" had been emancipated. It was also partly due to the far-reaching influence of Berlin Jewry, which was the first to assimilate.

Martin Buber has this to say in speaking of the German Jew of the older generation who seemingly was successfully assimilated: "He has split his soul in two. Whatever derives from his environment and fits into it, that he puts into concrete operation. Whatever derives from his past, the true roots of his soul, that he expresses in the abstract, removes from reality, keeps mentally isolated. And if it does not lend itself to abstraction, as in family relations, or, for some, in religious ritual, it is withdrawn from the rest of his daily life as constituting a special sphere of the intimate or the sacred. . . . Such assimilation is, of course, possessed of an idea; but while it possesses an idea, it does not possess Truth. For truth to the environment of the Self which exists by the neglect of the original source of the Self is not truth at all."

This was said of the typical German Jew of the older generation, including even the Neo-Orthodox Jew. It applies to those who could not bear to hear of their fathers' reminiscences, who would keep them reverently stored away in their beautiful libraries but would never open them nor show them to their children so that their works remained unknown until, with the break-up of the home, their children discovered them for themselves. This younger generation have no vital interest impelling them to ignore a humble peddler forefather who could neither speak nor write correct German, nor have they any need to seek a romantic disguise for their past in Germany. They are aware of the abyss and their answer is that of Franz Rosenzweig: "If life were to put me on the wrack to tear me asunder, I know to which side my heart would belong, for it is not situated symmetrically in the center." But Rosenzweig believed that he could never survive such an operation. History has not yet answered the question whether the German Jews will survive it. But if they do, then only will they contribute to the sum total of those great impressions that constitute Jewish history, to what Nietzsche summarized as this "abundance of passions, virtues, resolutions, resignations, struggles and victories of all kinds." For only those experiences that need neither be forgotten nor disguised truly constitute history.

A Note on Lag B'Omer

By Ira Eisenstein

I

IN the minds of most Jews in this generation, Lag B'Omer is a day not to be taken too seriously. It is vaguely associated with the permissibility of weddings and haircuts, and in the religious schools, the children know it as the day when they romp in the fields and the tutorial discipline is relaxed. In Jewish tradition, Lag B'Omer has been a kind of festival in search of a meaning. One tradition gives the day its uniqueness by identifying it

with the gladsome occasion when the raging plague, which carried off thousands of Rabbi Akiba's pupils, eased its severity for a while. Another tradition claims that the manna first descended to nourish the wandering Israelites in the desert on the 18th of Iyar.

The most popular association is that with the death of Rabbi Simeon Bar Yohai. The ancient mystics declared that, at his death, all the worlds were wed into a harmonious whole; the passing of the saint was therefore a festive event, to be celebrated by symbolisms related to Bar Yohai's saintly career. Bon fires were to be lighted, for Bar Yohai had given light to the world. He had revealed the uttermost secrets of the universe to his pupils. And because no rainbow had ever appeared during the life of Rabbi Simeon, bows and arrows were to be the instruments for signalizing the day of his passing.

This is all pretty remote from the main stream of present day Jewish thinking and living. The very fact that Lag B'Omer has fallen into desuetude as a day to be seriously observed, in this country, is a fair indication of the extent to which the whole mystical and cabbalistic tradition has ceased to function. Mysticism played a significant role in almost every generation of Jewish thought; today its role is so insignificant that the new comer upon the scene might never suspect the existence of the rich mystical tradition in Judaism; the tradition of the Ma'aseh Merkabah, the esoteric knowledge which Moses received on Mount Sinai, and which was intended only for the edification of the wise; of the potency of the Shem Ha-meforash, the true name of God, to infuse life into lifeless clay—as in the tale of the Golem; of the magic formulae, the books of cures, the allegorical interpretations of Scriptures, the excursions by men like Azzai, Zomah, Abuyah and Akiba, into the realms of the forbidden unknown; of the messianic movements initiated by mystics and cabbalists; of the Hassidism of more recent years.

Has mysticism a place in Jewish life today? Is there any possibility that mysticism will once more play a part in the emotional or intellectual processes of modern Jewry? I believe that there is a function for mysticism in Jewish life today, and I am inclined to appoint Lag B'Omer as the day dedicated to the proposition that a healthy mysticism is indispensable to the proper functioning of the human personality.

II

What, exactly, was the character of the traditional mysticism? We observe two main divisions. The first is the theurgic, which assumed the form of magic formulae, the use of letters and combinations of letters for the purpose of governing the world of nature. The theurgic aspect of mysticism is, in reality, the ancestor of modern science, seeking answers to those perennial questions concerning the origin of the world, the secret of creation, the origins of matter, energy, the life force—not only to satisfy a natural curiosity, but to be able to master the life force and to redirect it into such channels as the heart desires.

Alchemy and astrology were products of this theurgic mysticism, together with all those other gropings after the secrets of inner realities; in due course, these strivings led men toward the light. With no other source of knowledge, and with no faith in their own intelligence and reason, the esoteric clues found in sacred tomes had to suffice, until men began to seek the truth outside the books, in nature herself. The theurgic character of mysticism, then, gave way to modern science. Observation, experimentation, these are the new authorities. Certainly, the theurgic aspect of mysticism must be considered permanently displaced, and although we have good reason to observe today that science by itself is no guarantee that mankind will not be utterly annihilated, the methodology of science is apparently here to stay.

There is, however, a second aspect to mysticism, the reflection of a deep hu-

man need. That need is to rise above the petty cares of every day life, and to escape, escape from the tawdry and the dull, from the ugly and the depressing, to a world of perfection. Even the most superficial observer can realize that men and women still experience that need to be shut off from the at-times intolerable sadness of the world. They experience the need, and they seek to satisfy that need. Cheap magazines sell by the hundreds of thousands; every adult in the United States, it is estimated, goes at least once a week to the movies.

Such escapists are shabbily treated by psychologists, educators and social reformers. They are regarded as vicious anti-social people, obstacles in the path of progress. This is not necessarily so. I believe that the necessity to escape the endless rounds of daily routine is as real and as genuine a need as the need for food. The pitiless and relentless drive of life carries most people along in a kind of dull, automatic activity which develops into a senseless momentum, continuing long after purposefulness has disappeared. In a sense, most people today conform in their mode of living to the clever definition of a fanatic: One who having forgotten his purpose redoubles his efforts.

There is no denying that life can become unbearable periodically; that every person with any degree of sensitivity feels the urge to escape. It is true that the method adopted by large masses of people to effect this escape only leaves them more exhausted, more drained of spiritual power, more reluctant to return to the world of realities. For that reason, we are in need today of a type of escape from the humdrum world of frustrations and failures, struggles and defeats which will both satisfy the profound urge for escape and at the same time stimulate in people a wholesome desire to return to life, refreshed and determined to carry on. We need a variety of mysticism, a communing with perfect things, with ideals and hopes, a periodic withdrawal from the intensity of living, into the realms of higher perspective.

III

Resort to meditation, prayer, contemplation—the name is unimportant—does not imply a reliance upon intuition for the answers to vexing problems. I do not advocate that we wait upon inspiration, messages, visions. Reason must still be our stronghold, science our method. To be sure, there are those today who have lost their faith in reason, who lean upon the visions of mystics. Great trouble has the world seen from those who proclaim the mysterious power of the blood, the race. Millions have been hypnotized by this mysticism; the end of its violent course is not yet in sight. *"Le coeur a ses raisons que la Raison ne connait point,"* said Pascal; but Pascal never dreamed of completely sacrificing *"la Raison."*

The mysticism which we require is the kind described by Hocking (in "The Meaning of God in Human Experience"): "On the one hand, the peace of the hermit, the silence of the forest, the . . . calm of absolute contemplation, the vision of God. On the other hand, the variety and stress of life, the zest of common ends, the mastery of means, the glory of infinite enterprise, the pride of creativity and self-possession. The modern world as a whole has made its choice. But there is a better choice, the choice of both." Indeed, we need the mastery of means together with the vision of God. The human mind, however, is so constructed that it cannot contain both simultaneously in their proper proportions for any length of time. Either the mastery of means begins to dominate, and the ends for which they are designed are forgotten—or the vision of God dominates and dissolves into the thin air of wishful thinking.

We must then alternate, as Hocking elsewhere prescribes, between the world as we know it and the world as we would like to have it, between the real and the ideal, between activity and meditation. This is one of the vital functions of religion in the modern world: to help the driven, hounded, harassed men and wo-

men to step aside for calm contemplation, to get a clearer vision of God, to escape, if you will, from the turmoil of time, and to enter upon the sweet serenity of timelessness, to rise, as it were, above the surface of living, into the stratosphere of life, and to observe the pattern that is being woven below. Then they should be brought back to earth, to try to model it upon that pattern of perfection which prayer has conjured up, and which meditation, contemplation, communion with God have revealed.

Perhaps, if Lag B'Omer were associated in our minds with such considerations as these, it would be taken a bit more seriously by the Jews of our day.

Meeting The Challenge To Democracy

By MORTIMER J. COHEN

THAT democracy as a way of life is being challenged today threatens to become one of those reiterated truths that no longer startle men into thought. Nevertheless, it is a terrifying truth that democracy is fighting for its very life, and in the outcome of its struggle against the dictatorship principle lies the future of precious spiritual values.

The ultimate goals of democracy may be taken for granted. Too much of our energy is spent on defending and praising them. What we have neglected to explore are the methods and techniques by which to achieve those goals. To be sure, we have stressed education as democracy's strongest weapon. But what we have forgotten, if ever we genuinely grasped its importance at all, is that for democracy to survive as a way of life education must be a life-long process. Men must be given the intellectual tools with which to decide for themselves what concerns the common welfare. They must be emotionally as well as intellectually prepared for cooperative thinking. It was Emerson who said that democracy dies one mile from the school-house. He said this with reference to the training of children; but it is far more pertinent to adults upon whose shoulders must rest the responsibility to choose proper leadership as well as to provide an informed and enlightened public opinion which is the ultimate source of strong democratic leadership. In a word, if democracy is to maintain itself in a challenging world, it must be enabled to meet that challenge by developing techniques through which information, confidence, and inner intellectual and spiritual strength can be developed. Democracy's dynamic is adult education.

"Adult Education: A Dynamic for Democracy" by Dorothy Hewitt, director of the Adult Education Center of Boston, and Kirtley F. Mather, professor of Geology at Harvard University,* is the product of deep thinking and rich, practical experience. It is clear as crystal water, thorough, practical in its suggestions, and inspiring. It is a book which should be owned by every person interested in democracy as a way of life, whether he be intelligent layman, educator, or rabbi. It should be studied and absorbed, and its philosophy and techniques ought to be applied to adult Jewish education. Would that some Jewish educator, inspired by this book, were to write on "Adult Jewish Education: A Dynamic for Judaism!"

The authors point out that adult education is not, as is sometimes erroneously thought, a course of study taken after working hours to train men in greater skills for their daily jobs, or to equip them for better positions, or to enable them to pile up credits for some academic degree. The purpose and intent of adult education relates rather to living a full and in-

* "Adult Education: A Dynamic for Democracy," by Dorothy Hewitt and Kirtley F. Mather, D. Appleton-Century Company.

telligent life in society. In the truest sense of the word, adult education is life itself, lived creatively and with awareness of the consequences of individual and social behavior. "The true purpose of adult education," write the authors, "is based on the idea that education is a continuing life-process, that mental and spiritual life, as well as physical life, are subject to the laws of growth and atrophy." "Broadly conceived and in the best sense, adult education includes all existing opportunities for adults to gain information, develop ideas, or create works of art."

Another common error we make about education, the authors point out, is found in our belief that the problems of democracy can be solved by the universal education of our youth. We have laid great emphasis on the young and their need of education. Having completed school—elementary, high, or even college—the youth is supposed to be equipped to face the issues and difficulties of his generation, and to help solve them. The fact has been overlooked that adults must continually be stimulated to think, to learn, to keep sensitive to the shifting forces of social change. "Too many generations have vainly thought that the problems of democracy in the United States could be solved by the universal education of youth. The fact is that it is adults who must be revitalized and brought into balance in order to gain the dynamic force necessary to deal with the situation. It is adults who need creative ability and energy to carry the heavy responsibility which rests upon mankind."

The authors have a deep faith in democracy itself, despite their sad apprehension that democracy's star is no longer in its ascendency, that large numbers are abandoning democracy as a way of life. Yet to them there is no escape from the conclusion that man's only hope for the future rests in his ability to use the common resources of the earth for the common welfare of all mankind on a cooperative basis. To live on the selfish basis of "dog eat dog" is to commit collective suicide. "In short, from the vantage point of the observer of the long procession of living organisms during geologic time (it is the professor of Geology who speaks), it appears that the ideals of democracy are the very ones demanded by the cosmic administration as a prerequisite for man's continuance as a ruling dynasty among earthly creatures."

The authors give more than their philosophy of adult education. They provide concrete suggestions, based on their successful experience in Boston, on how to make adult education attractive and effective. They advise how to make an analysis of the community, discover adult interests and needs, appeal to the public, and develop leadership in groups. They give practical advice in the selection of methods and techniques in the search for truth and creative expression. They evaluate such techniques as the Group Discussion, the Public Conversation, and the Panel Discussion. They estimate the use of the Lecture, the Forum, the Symposium, and the Debate. And they aid with definite plans and ideas how these may be used, under what circumstances, and by whom, to the fullest advantage.

This conception of adult education is so close to that of the traditional Jewish attitude of *torah lishemah* that at first blush it may be supposed that we have learned nothing new. It is true that we Jews have a tradition of study but unfortunately that tradition is conspicuous more in the breach than in the observance. Moreover, the old methods of study no longer meet our needs adequately. The urgent problems of our generation—local, Palestinian, international—require information, discussion, participation in the formation of policies, and the creation of that intelligent Jewish public opinion needed for the support of our spokesmen before the bar of world public opinion. If Jewish life, locally and internationally, is to be democratic in spirit, if Judaism is to illuminate all the facets of Jewish life and thought today, then a program of adult Jewish education is of fundamental importance.